

Al-Fārābī on *milla*¹

Al-Fārābī par milla

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In order to achieve happiness, the inhabitants of the Excellent City must know certain metaphysical truths, which are only accessible to the non-philosophers through a system of symbols, called by Fārābī *milla* (“religion”). However, the symbols in which the *milla* expresses these truths contain certain topics of contention, which, in turn, posits the problem of the “noble lie”. In my article, I will discuss the relevant intricacies.

Keywords: Al-Fārābī, *milla*, Excellent City, Philosopher King, achievement of happiness, noble lie.

The Cave

According to Al-Fārābī, the situation of the human being, prior to his mastering logic and philosophy, is that of the captive, described in Plato’s allegory of the Cave (in Book VII of the *Republic*, 514a–520a): instead of the realities of the things, he deals with their shadows and symbols – or, rather, with the symbols of the symbols.² It is only possible to exit the cave of ignorance through a systematic study of the logical arts,³ in the following strict order: poetics, rhetoric, sophistic, dialectic, and demonstration, claims he.⁴

¹ An earlier version of this article was presented at the Aquinas and the Arabs International Working Group Summer Meeting 2016 at Cordoba University, Spain, on June 20, 2016.

² The edited Latin text of the passage was first published in Boggess, William F. Alfarabi and the Rhetoric: The Cave Revisited. *Phronesis*, 1970, 15/1, p. 89 (cf. Al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr. *Deux ouvrages inédits sur la rhétorique: I. Kitāb al-Ḥaṭāba. II. Didascalía in rethoricam Aristotelis ex glossa Alfarabi*. Langhade, Jacques; Grignaschi, Mario. Beirut: Dār Al-Mashriq, 1971, p. 213). The passage has been translated from Latin into English by Shawn Welnak (Welnak, Shawn. *Philosophy and the Cave of Opinion: the Graeco-Arabic Tradition*. Ph. D. dissertation, Tulane University, 2011), p. 179) and Frédérique Woerther (Woerther, Frédérique. Al-Fārābī and the *Didascalía*. In: *Aristotle and the Arabic Tradition*. Alwishah, Ahmed; Hayes, Josh (eds.). Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2015, pp. 96–97). Cf. also Ibn Bājjā’s account on the Cave. In: Ibn Bāggā (Avempace). *La conduite de l’isolé et deux autres épîtres*. Genequand, Charles (ed., transl.). Paris: Vrin, 2010, p. 198, §§ 47–48.

³ Certainly, this was not Plato’s own opinion: as shown by Findlay, Plato saw mathematical, rather than logical, sciences, as means of deliverance from the Cave (Findlay, John N. *Plato: The Written and Unwritten Doctrines*. London: Routledge and Kegan, Paul. 1974, pp. 189–192).

⁴ Boggess, William F. Alfarabi and the Rhetoric, p. 89; Welnak, Shawn. *Philosophy and the Cave of Opinion*, p. 180.

The underlying philosophy of the curriculum was discussed by Plato in the *Republic*, 509d–511e.⁵ Still, its successful implementation would not have been possible without the Aristotle’s textbooks (and commentaries on them), dealing with the relevant sciences. By mastering metaphysics, the student would reach the summit of the knowledge, accessible to the human being that would result in establishing a sort of conjunction (*ittiṣāl*) with the Agent Intellect, which was regarded by Al-Fārābī as the highest degree of happiness (*al-sa’āda al-quṣwā, æscath Ūdaimonia*).⁶

However, having achieved his personal happiness, the accomplished philosopher must return to the Cave, in order to liberate his former fellow-captives and to bring them to that level of happiness that is accessible to each of them, in accordance with their innate disposition and preparedness. Thus, the political philosophy begins with the philosopher’s return to the cave.

This return is accomplished by means of an analogical representation of the intelligible realities (*ḥaqā’iq*) in meanings or concepts (*ma’ānī*) and, through them, in words (*alfāz*). In this way, a continuous analogy or proportion between three levels of being is established: A (reality/truth) relates to B (concept/meaning) as B (concept/meaning) relates to C (word).

$$A : B = B : C^7$$

This type of analogy, apparently, is first discussed in Plato’s *Timaeus* 31c–32a, in the passage dealing with the “square” numbers:

... there must needs be some intermediary bond to connect the two. And the fairest of bonds is that which most perfectly unites into one both itself and the things which it binds together; and to effect this in the fairest manner is the natural property of proportion. For whenever the middle term of any three numbers, cubic or square, is such that as the first term is to it, so is it to the last term, and again, conversely, as the last term is to the middle, so is the middle to the first, – then the middle term becomes in turn the first

⁵ Cf. Plato. *Republic*, 521d–535a and Al-Fārābī. Taḥṣīl al-sa’āda. In: *ibid.*, *The Philosophical Works*. Al Yasin (ed.). Beirut: Dar Al-Manahel, 1992, p. 166 (§ 45). Cf. Vallat, Philippe. *Fārābī et l’École d’Alexandrie. Des prémisses de la connaissance à la philosophie politique*. Paris: Vrin, 2004, pp. 190, 195.

⁶ Al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr. *Risāla fī al-’aql*. Bouyges, Maurice (ed.). Beirut: Imprimerie catholique, 1938, p. 31, l. 6. Cf. Porphyry. *On the Life of Plotinus and the Order of His Books*. 23.1.13. In: Plotinus. *Enneads*. Armstrong, Arthur H. (transl.). 3rd ed. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989, Vol. 1, p. 70; cf. also Walzer’s comment in Al-Fārābī, *On the Perfect State*, p. 443, n. 669.

⁷ Vallat, Philippe. *Farabi et l’École d’Alexandrie*, pp. 278, 353; Vallat, Philippe. Vrai philosophe et faux prophète selon Farabi. Aspects historiques et théoriques de l’art du symbole. In: *Miroir et Savoir. La transmission d’un thème platonicien, des Alexandrins à la philosophie arabo-musulmane. Actes du colloque international tenu à Leuven et -la-Neuve, les 17 et 18 novembre 2005*. Smet, Daniel de; Sebti, Meryem; Callataÿ, Godefroid de (eds.). Ancient and Medieval Philosophy. De Wulf-Mansion Centre. Series 1/38. Leuven: Peeters, 2008, p. 134.

and the last, while the first and last become in turn middle terms, and the necessary consequence will be that all the terms are interchangeable, and being interchangeable they all form a unity.⁸

The passage establishes the continuous analogy or proportion as an important element of Plato's methodology. This analogy differs both from the unity by analogy, posited by Aristotle in the "Nicomachean Ethics" V, 1131a31–32, and from the geometrical analogy/proportion discussed by Archytas and Euclid (proposition V.3 in "Elements"),⁹ which describes the relationship (discrete proportion) between two pairs of notions with no common notion shared.

The principle of the continuous analogy, among other things, implies, that language was instituted by the philosophers. In its original version, every word directly referred to a certain philosophical meaning/notion, which, in turn, referred to an intelligible metaphysical reality. Afterwards, the commoners (non-philosophers) came to use these words in a metaphorical sense in rhetoric, sophistic, and poetics. This usage obfuscated their primary meaning, but, nevertheless, did not eliminate it completely, since the metaphorical meaning, to some extent, still partook of the primary meaning, which directly referred to the relevant metaphysical reality.¹⁰

Basing his reasoning on the theory of the continuous analogy, as developed by Plato, Al-Fārābī argues for the analogical structure of both being and language. Hence, by necessity, the structure of the excellent philosophical city must also be analogous: language and city were both created as images and/or tools that analogically reproduce the structure of the intelligible reality.¹¹ Therefore, the city resembles language in a certain way – namely, structurally, they both represent a set or system of interrelated symbols, created by the philosophers for non-philosophers, in order

⁸ *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, Vol. 9. Lamb, Walter R. M. (transl.). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press – London, William Heinemann Ltd., 1925; quoted from <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0180%3Atext%3DTim.%3Asection%3D32a> [last viewed February 1, 2016]. Cf. also the discussion on the line (*Republic*, 509d–511c) that explains the relationship between the visible and the intelligible, where Plato uses the expression "in the same proportion" (ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ λόγῳ) (509d8).

⁹ "If a first magnitude is the same multiple of a second that a third is of a fourth, and if equimultiples are taken of the first and third, then the magnitudes taken also are equimultiples respectively, the one of the second and the other of the fourth". Available at <http://aleph0.clarku.edu/~djoyce/java/elements/bookV/bookV.html#defs> [last viewed February 1, 2016].

¹⁰ Al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr. *Kitāb al-ḥurūf*. Muhsin Mahdī (ed.), 2nd ed., Beirut: Dār Al-Mashriq, 1990, p. 165 (§ 164); cf. Al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr. *Book of Letters*. Mahdī, Muhsin; Butterworth Charles (transl.). Unpublished manuscript, p. 27; Vallat, Philippe. *Farabi et l'École d'Alexandrie*. p. 261 and Druart, Thérèse-Anne. Al-Fārābī: An Arabic Account of the Origin of Language and of Philosophical Vocabulary. *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association*, 84, 2010, pp. 1–3 (which, however, focuses on the evolution of language in terms of time, from the utterances that explain the basic necessities to the development of dialectic reasoning).

¹¹ Vallat, Philippe. *Farabi et l'École d'Alexandrie*, pp. 293–294.

to convey to the latter the philosophical truths in the persuasive form of correct opinions.¹²

The City and the Philosopher-King

The emergence and existence of the Excellent (*fāḍila*, which, in the given context, is synonymous with “Exemplary” or “Ideal” – J. E.) City is impossible without the philosophers – a group or class of people who possess the required qualifications for its establishment and government. Virtually all accounts of these philosopher-rulers, found in the medieval Arabo-Islamic texts, are based on the relevant sections from Plato’s *Republic* (474c4–511e, especially 476d–480a). As Plato explains in the *Republic* 505a1–2 and c3, the outstanding attribute of the philosopher is his knowledge of the forms (or ideas, *eide*) – in particular, the form of Good. This distinguishes him from the common people, who do not know any *eidos* – at best, they believe in it.¹³ According to Al-Fārābī, the distinguishing feature of the philosopher is his being the intellect (‘*aql*) and the intellected (*ma‘qūl*) in *actu* (*bi al-fi‘l*),¹⁴ which presupposes his being in perpetual conjunction with the Agent Intellect (*al-‘aql al-fā‘āl*).

Indeed, any man whose Passive Intellect has thus been perfected by [having apprehended] all the intelligibles and has actually become intellect and actually being thought, so that the intelligible in him has become identical with that which thinks in him, acquires an actual intellect which is superior to the Passive Intellect and more perfect and more separate from matter than the Passive Intellect. It is called the “Acquired Intellect” and comes to occupy a middle position between the Passive Intellect and the Active Intellect, nothing else being between it and the Active Intellect. The Passive Intellect is thus like matter and substratum for the Acquired Intellect, and the Acquired Intellect like matter and substratum for the Active Intellect, and the rational faculty, which is a natural disposition, is a matter underlying the Passive Intellect.

... when the natural disposition is made the matter of the Passive Intellect which has become actually intellect, and the Passive Intellect the matter of the Acquired Intellect, and the Acquired Intellect the matter of the Active Intellect, and when all this is taken as one and the same thing, then this man is the man on whom the Active Intellect has descended.¹⁵

¹² Vallat, Philippe. *Vrai philosophe et faux prophète selon Farabi*, p. 125.

¹³ In the language of medieval scholasticism, this means that the philosopher possesses the knowledge of the unchanging universals, while, *qua philosopher*, he does not have – and cannot have – any knowledge of the particulars. See Sedley, David. Philosophy, the Forms, and the Art of Ruling. In: Ferrari, Giovanni R. F. (ed.). *The Cambridge Companion to Plato’s Republic*. Cambridge – New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 260.

¹⁴ Al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr. *On the Perfect State*, p. 240 (V, 15, §8).

¹⁵ Al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr. *On the Perfect State*, p. 240 (V, 15, §8). This, apparently, means that the philosopher is immortal as long as his intellect in *actu* thinks the Agent Intellect, which is sometimes interpreted as an **instantaneous** immortality, achieved/experienced in the act of thought – see Alexandre d’Aphrodise, *De l’âme*, 355 (commentary on 90.11–91.6, with references to further discussion). Cf. also Vallat’s discussion in Vallat, Philippe. *Onto-noétique*.

In terms of its structure, Al-Fārābī's city resembles the human body:

The city and the household may be compared with the body of a man. Just as the body is composed of different parts of a determinate number, some more, some less excellent, in neighbourhood and in grade, each doing a certain work, and there is combined from all their actions mutual help towards the perfection of the aim in a man's body, so the city and the household are each composed of different parts of a determinate number, some less, some more excellent, in their relation of neighbourhood and graded in different grades, each doing a certain work corresponding to it.¹⁶

Al-Fārābī devotes the entire chapter 10 of the *Mabādi'* to the discussion of the faculties of the soul; by doing so, he tacitly accepts the parallel drawn by Plato between the soul and the city, along with the aforementioned parallel between the city and the human body (discussed in the *Fuṣūl muntaza'a* §25);¹⁷ however, he does not elaborate on the former.

Unlike Plato's Kallipolis, which comprises only three classes, Al-Fārābī's Excellent City (according to the *Fuṣūl muntaza'a*) is divided into five strata – the excellent ones (*al-afāḍil*) (i.e., philosophers proper), “the possessors of the tongues” (preachers, orators, poets, musicians, scribes and those similar to them), the evaluators (*muqaddirūn*) (accountants, engineers, physicians, astronomers/astrologers and suchlike), the fighters (combatants and protectors) and the acquirers/possessors of wealth (*māliyyūn*) (peasants, shepherds and merchants etc.).

The unity of the ideal city or state is five-fold, being made up of the most virtuous or excellent, the interpreters, the experts, the fighting-men and the rich. The most excellent are the wise, the intelligent and the prudent in great matters affecting the whole of religion. The interpreters are the orators, the eloquent, the poets, the musicians, the secretaries and the like, belonging to their group. The experts are the accountants, the geometers, the doctors, the astrologers and the like. The fighting men are the army, the guards and the like, reckoned with them. The rich are they who gain wealth in the city, such as farmers, herdsmen, merchants and the like.¹⁸

Taken together, the first three of these strata correspond to Plato's rulers, subdivided into three parts. The representatives of the highest class of Al-Fārābī's Excellent

L'Intellect et les intellects chez Farabi. In: Al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr. *L'Épître sur l'intellect*. Val-lat, Philippe (annot., transl.). Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2012, pp. 175–178.

¹⁶ Al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr. *Fuṣūl muntaza'a*. Najjār, Fawzī M. (ed.). Beirut: Dār Al-Mashriq, 1971, pp. 41–42 (§ 25). The English translation of the passage quoted here is by Dunlop. In: Dunlop, Douglas M. Al-Fārābī's Aphorisms of the Statesman. *Iraq*, Autumn 1952, 14/2, p. 103.

¹⁷ Al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr. *Fuṣūl muntaza'a*, pp. 41–42 (§ 25); Dunlop, Douglas M. Al-Fārābī's Aphorisms, p. 103.

¹⁸ Al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr. *Fuṣūl muntaza'a*, pp. 65–66 (§ 57); Dunlop, Douglas M. Al-Fārābī's Aphorisms, p. 113.

City base their knowledge on the demonstrative or apodictic syllogism; the second highest – on dialectical, rhetorical, sophistic and poetical syllogisms, depending on their relevant activity. It appears that the three lower classes do not consciously build their activities on any particular kind of syllogism. Their role appears to be that of the “consumers” (through imitation) of the theoretical knowledge, possessed by the two upper strata.¹⁹

Achievement of happiness through *milla*

The excellent or philosophical city is established by the philosopher-king and his officers so that it may serve as a means for the achievement of happiness for man and mankind, and as a locus of man’s (self-)substantiation (*tajawhur*).²⁰ The achievement of happiness, in its true sense, is understood by Al-Fārābī as the conjunction with the Agent Intellect, whereas (self-) substantiation refers to the actualization of human intellect in the gradual and multi-phase process of self-intellection (*ta’aqul*) (discussed in the *Risālat fī al-‘aql*²¹).

The term νοῦς ποιητικὸς, typically designating the Agent or Active Intellect (with whom the individual intellect of the philosopher conjoins), was apparently first introduced by Aristotle in his *De Anima* III.5.15, where he used it to designate the active part of the human soul (stating that “mind [=intellect – J. E.] has another aspect in that it **makes** all things (ἔδ τὶ ποιῆται ποιεῖν)”.

But since, as in the whole of nature, to something which serves it as matter for each kind (and this is potentially all the passive members of the kind) there corresponds something else which is the cause or agent because it makes them all, the two being related to one another as art to its material, of necessity these differences must be found also in the soul. And to the one intellect, which answers to this description because it becomes all things, corresponds the other because it makes all things, like a sort of definite quality such as light.²²

¹⁹ The 48th epistle of the Ikhwān Al-Ṣafā’ gives an alternative division of the classes of the Excellent City, based on the gradation of men’s abilities according to their age (Ikhwān Al-Ṣafā’. *Rasā’il ikhwān al-ṣafā’ wa khullān al-wafā’*. Ghālib, M. (ed.). Beirut: Dār Al-Ṣādir, 1957, 4 vols., Vol. 4, p. 693). It might be based on the summary/synopsis of the account of men’s education in Kallipolis (*Republic*, 503e–505b and 535a–540a).

²⁰ Al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr. *Taḥṣīl al-sa’āda*, p. 116, ll. 1–6; cf. Vallat, Philippe. *Farabi et l’École d’Alexandrie*, p. 343.

²¹ Al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr. *Risāla fī al-‘aql*. Bouyges, Maurice (ed.). Beirut: Imprimerie catholique, 1938; translated by Vallat into French as Abū Naṣr Al-Fārābī. *L’Épître sur l’intellect*, Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2012. On the identity of these two concepts in Al-Fārābī’s thought, see Vallat’s essay *Onto-noétique. L’Intellect et les intellects chez Farabi*. In: *L’Épître sur l’intellect*, pp. 65–196, particularly his remarks on p. 128.

²² Aristotle. *On the Soul. Parva Naturalia. On Breath*. Hett Walter S. (transl.). London – Cambridge, MA: Heinemann – Harvard University Press, 1936, 7th reprint, 2000, pp. 170–171.

It seems that Aristotle there refers to the active part of the rational human soul, which actualizes its passive counterpart. Due to the obscurity of the passage, there is no consensus among the commentators: while Alexander of Aphrodisias considers the *νοῦς ποιητικὸς* to be an entity outside the human soul:

Dans le cas où ce qui est pensé est, par sa nature propre, tel qu'il est pensé (et s'il est de cette nature, il est aussi incorruptible), il demeure incorruptible même s'il est séparé du fait d'être pensé. Par conséquent, l'intellect qui pense un tel objet est lui aussi incorruptible, non pas l'intellect substrat et matériel (car cet intellect se corrompt en même temps que lui), mais l'intellect qui devient identique en acte à son objet quand il le pense (parce qu'il s'assimile à chacune des choses pensées, lorsqu'elles sont pensées: si la chose pensée est de telle nature, il devient lui aussi de cette nature lorsqu'il le pense), c'est-à-dire que l'intellect en acte devient cet intellect qui vient en nous du dehors et qui est incorruptible. En fait, les autres pensées viennent elles aussi du dehors, non pas toutefois en étant un intellect, mais en le devenant dans le fait d'être pensées. Or, c'est aussi en tant qu'intellect que cet intellect vient du dehors, car lui seul, parmi les formes pensées, est un intellect par soi et indépendamment du fait d'être pensé. Il est incorruptible, parce que sa nature est de ce genre. Tel est donc en nous l'intellect que l'on considère incorruptible – car il existe en nous un intellect séparé et incorruptible, qu'Aristote appelle également un intellect « qui vient du dehors » ; c'est-à-dire un intellect qui vient en nous de l'extérieur -, et il ne s'agit pas de la puissance de l'âme qui se trouve en nous, ni de la disposition selon laquelle l'intellect en puissance pense les autres formes et cet intellect.²³

In turn, Themistius might have viewed it as (becoming) a part of the human soul:

The productive (read: Agent. – J. E.) intellect is not outside [the potential intellect as] the craft [is outside] its matter (as [for example] the craft of forging is with bronze, or carpentry with wood), but the productive intellect settles into the whole of the potential intellect, as though the carpenter and the smith did not control their wood and bronze externally but were able to pervade it totally.²⁴

²³ Alexander of Aphrodisias. Commentary on Aristotle's *De Anima* 89.21–91.6, particularly 90.11–91.6; cf. also 88.17–89.20.

²⁴ Themistius. *On Aristotle's On the Soul*. Todd, Robert B. (transl.). London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013, p. 123, 99, 11 (430a12–13, 14–15, 18–19); cf. Lyons, Malcolm C. (ed.). *An Arabic Translation of Themistius Commentary on Aristoteles De Anima*. Oxford: Cassirer, 1973, p. 179. However, cf. Schroeder and Todd's opinion, according to which, "Themistius... establishes a gulf between God and the soul-related productive intellect, and represents the latter as **occupying a suprahuman noetic realm** that acts as the guarantor of human reasoning". Schroeder, Frederic M.; Todd, Robert B. (transl.). *Two Greek Aristotelian Commentators on the Intellect: The De Intellectu Attributed to Alexander of Aphrodisias and Themistius' Paraphrase of Aristotle De Anima 3.4–8*. Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1990, p. 38.

Al-Fārābī believes that, in order to achieve happiness, the inhabitants of the Excellent City must possess knowledge of certain metaphysical truths. These include the First Cause, the immaterial intellects, the celestial substances, the natural bodies, the man, the first ruler and his substitutes, and the Excellent City.²⁵ Knowledge of these, which is viewed as the precondition for the achievement of happiness, can be acquired either through demonstration and theoretical insight, or through affinity and symbolical representation depending on the difference of the inborn qualities of the people. Only the philosophers by virtue of their nature are able to rise to the level of independent thought, based on demonstration, while the non-philosophers can approach the truth solely through symbols, which, inevitably, reflect only part of it. **Al-Fārābī calls the system of the symbolic representations of the metaphysical truths/realities, designed for the non-philosophers, *milla*, which can be approximately translated as “religion” or “confession”.**²⁶

[The term] *milla* refers to the possible opinions and actions, determined and prescribed by the [religious] law, given to the community by the First Ruler, with the intention of the achievement of a certain goal through the community’s practice of it, with respect to that community or by means of it.²⁷

In the *Kitāb al-milla*, Al-Fārābī claims that the rule of the first ruler may be excellent, ignorant, errant, or deceptive. The excellent rule consists in seeking the true happiness. The false happiness consists in the acquisition of some ignorant goods (such as health and well-being, wealth, pleasure, honour and glory). If the ruler is errant, he seeks to obtain something presumed to be ultimate happiness but in fact is not such. If his rule is deceptive, he ostensibly seeks to obtain true happiness, whereas in fact he strives to obtain some of the ignorant goods.²⁸

In the *al-Mabādi’*, the issue is further elaborated. Al-Fārābī lists four types of non-excellent cities: the ignorant city (*al-madīna al-jāhiliya*), the wicked city (*al-madīna al-fāsiqa*), the city which has deliberately changed its character (*al-madīna al-mutabaddala*) and the city which has missed the right path (*al-madīna al-ḡalla*) (*Mabādi’* V, 15, 15) (these types do not have direct analogues in the *Republic*).

In turn, in the *Kitāb al-siyāsa al-madaniyya* (which perhaps was written after both *Kitāb al-milla* and *al-Mabādi’*) Al-Fārābī follows the *Republic* closer, treating

²⁵ Al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr. *On the Perfect State*. pp. 276–279 (V, 17, §1); cf. Walzer’s commentary *ibid.*, pp. 472–474, and Janssens, Jules. Al-Farabi: la religion comme imitation de la philosophie. In: *Orient – Occident: racines spirituelles de l’Europe. Enjeux et implications de la translatio studiorum dans le judaïsme, le christianisme et l’islam de l’Antiquité à la Renaissance. Actes du colloque scientifique international 16–19 novembre 2009*. Delgado, Mariano; Méla, Charles; Möri, Frédéric (eds.). Paris: CERF, 2014, p. 500.

²⁶ See Al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr. *Kitāb al-milla wa nuṣuṣ ukhrā*. Maḥdī, Muḥsin (ed.). Beirut: Dār Al-Mashriq, 1968, index of ‘*milla*’; *ibid.*, *On the Perfect State*. pp. 280 (V, 17, §2), 286 (V, 18, §1), 322 (V, 19, §7); cf. Walzer’s commentary *ibid.*, p. 475.

²⁷ Al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr. *Kitāb al-milla*, p. 43. Vallat believes that *milla* is to be viewed as a civil religion of the city, which symbolically represents the metaphysics (of Neoplatonic pedigree). Vallat, Philippe. *Farabi et l’École d’Alexandrie*, p. 304.

²⁸ Al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr. *Kitāb al-milla*, pp. 43–44.

the four non-excellent cities discussed in the *Republic* (timocrat, oligarch, democrat and tyrant)²⁹ as sub-types of the ignorant city. They are discussed in the following order: 1) the oligarchic city (*al-madīna al-nadhāla*),³⁰ 2) the timocratic city (*al-madīna al-karrāmiyya*),³¹ 3) the tyrannical city (*madīnat al-taghallub*),³² and the democratic city (*al-madīna al-jamā'iyya*).³³ Hence, along with Walzer,³⁴ we can conclude that, during the composition of the *Kitāb al-siyāsa al-madaniyya*, Al-Fārābī had access to the paraphrase of the Books VIII and IX of the *Republic*.

Furthermore, along with these four sub-types of the ignorant city, Al-Fārābī discusses two other – the city of basic necessity and the hedonistic city. Al-Fārābī's account of the types of the cities does not reflect Plato's conception, according to which the sequence of the regimes or constitutions reflects the increasing corruption and degradation of the excellent city Kallipolis (for which reason, they should be arranged according to the degree of that corruption). Walzer believes that the changes in the structure of the discussion on the non-excellent cities are an indicator of Plato's description of the wrong constitutions was adapted and transmitted in Hellenistic and Roman philosophical schools,³⁵ whose heir Al-Fārābī was.

It should be added that, according to Al-Fārābī, these types of faulty cities or corrupt regimes result from different types of (faulty) **views** of their inhabitants (but not from their **characters**, as Plato believes), which form a part or the whole of their religion and are borrowed from the ancients – Al-Fārābī is probably referring here to the Christians, who adopted from the Neoplatonists such attitudes as contempt for the human condition and hatred of the (material) body.³⁶ One wonders whether, in his accusation, Al-Fārābī merely repeats what was a commonplace view in the philosophical tradition in which he was trained, or whether he is expressing his personal opinion. At our present state of knowledge about this tradition (in particular, in the

²⁹ In Plato's *Republic*, the four types of non-excellent cities represent the product and/or manifestation of four types of people (timocrat, oligarch, democrat and tyrant). The prevailing influence of a certain type of people in the city-state leads to the establishment of a particular type of constitution. The four types of constitution (timocracy, oligarchy, democracy and tyranny), described by Plato in the *Republic*, 545c–576b. The timocratic city is dealt with in 545c–550b; the oligarchic city in 550c–555b; the democratic city in 555b–562a; the tyrannical city in 562a–576b, represent the four stages of gradually increasing corruption and decline of Kallipolis, each subsequent stage emerging from its immediate antecedent.

³⁰ Al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr. *Kitāb al-siyāsa al-madaniyya*. Najjār, Fawzī M. (ed.). 2nd ed. Beirut: Dār Al-Mashriq, 1993, p. 191; cf. Vallat's translation in Al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr. *Le Livre du régime politique*. Vallat, Philippe (transl.). Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2012, pp. 190–191.

³¹ Al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr. *Kitāb al-siyāsa al-madaniyya*, pp. 193–199; cf. Vallat's translation in Al-Fārābī. *Le Livre du régime politique*, pp. 192–202.

³² Al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr. *Kitāb al-siyāsa al-madaniyya*, pp. 199–203; cf. Vallat's translation in Al-Fārābī. *Le Livre du régime politique*, pp. 202–208.

³³ Al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr. *Kitāb al-siyāsa al-madaniyya*, pp. 206–208; cf. Vallat's translation in Al-Fārābī. *Le Livre du régime politique*, pp. 211–213.

³⁴ See Walzer's commentary in Al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr. *On the Perfect State*, p. 451.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr. *On the Perfect State*, p. 322 (VI, 19, §7); cf. Walzer's commentary ibid., p. 501.

period between Simplicius and Al-Fārābī), it is, unfortunately, impossible to give a definitive answer.

According to Al-Fārābī, “religion” (*milla*) and “creed” (*dīn*) are synonymous, as are “[religious] law” (*sharī‘a*) and “tradition” (*sunna*). Most often, the latter two signify and apply to the determined actions in the two parts of religion. The determined opinions, in a way, may also be called “law”, so that “law”, “religion”, and “creed” would all be regarded as synonymous with each other. Hence, it may be said that religion consists of two parts – the part that determines opinions and the part that determines actions.

The determined opinions in the excellent religion are either the truth or a likeness of the truth (the truth being what a human being ascertains by means of primary knowledge, or by demonstration). Any religion, in which the religious opinions disagree with the knowledge, obtained either intuitively or by demonstration, and in which there is also no likeness of the thing through which we can ascertain the truth is an errant religion.

The excellent religion is similar to philosophy, and, like the latter, divides into theoretical and practical. The theoretical part deals with the things which a human being knows, but in relation to which he cannot take action, whereas the practical part comprises the affairs in relation to which a human being is able to act if he possesses knowledge of them. The practical part of religion finds its universals in practical philosophy. Consequently, this part consists of these universals determined by conditions which delimit them. Therefore, all excellent (religious) laws are subordinate to the universals of practical philosophy. The theoretical opinions found in religion have their demonstrative proofs in theoretical philosophy, whereas the religion accepts them without such proofs.

Most people who are taught the opinions of religion and perform its prescribed actions are not capable of understanding a philosophic discussion, either due to the limitations of their inborn nature or due to their preoccupation with other things.³⁷ However, they do not fail to understand generally accepted or persuasive truths. Hence, both dialectic (*jadal*), which yields strong opinion on most things on which demonstrative proofs yield certainty, and rhetoric (*khiṭāba*), which persuades about most of what cannot be proven by demonstration, play a major role in verifying the religious opinions of the citizens and in firmly establishing these opinions in their souls.³⁸

The systems of *milla* (as well as the languages used by them) differ from each other in terms of their propinquity to the truth, but, since all of them, as a rule, imitate metaphysical truth, they are preceded by philosophy of some sort.³⁹ The symbols and imitations which they use to express this truth contain a number of

³⁷ Hence, according to both Plato (*Republic* 352d–354a) and Al-Fārābī, the happiness of the non-philosopher lies in the impeccable fulfilment of the particular role, assigned to him in the city.

³⁸ Al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr. *Kitāb al-milla*, pp. 47–48. Cf. Butterworth’s translation in Alfarabi. *The Political Writings*. Vol. 1. Selected Aphorisms and Other Texts. Ithaca, NY, and London: Cornell University Press, 2001, p. 98.

³⁹ Al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr. *On the Perfect State*. Walzer’s commentary on pp. 475–476.

topics of contention (*mawāḍiʿ al-inād*) (discussed in Aristotle's *Topica* VIII, 14, 163b34–164a3),

You must accustom yourself to making a single argument into many, keeping the process as secret as possible. This would be best achieved by avoiding as far as possible anything closely connected with the divided into topic under discussion. Arguments which are entirely universal will be best suited to this treatment, for universal as example, the argument that 'there is not one knowledge of more than one thing'; for this applies to relative terms, contraries and co-ordinates.⁴⁰

against which irrefutable objections can be voiced.⁴¹ The ability to detect these topics of contention testifies to one's philosophical capacity, which can be measured according to the subtleness of the topic.

La plupart des hommes n'ont pas, que ce soit par nature ou du fait de l'habitude, la capacité de comprendre ces choses [les principes des étants et la félicité] et de les concevoir formellement. À ceux-là, il convient de suggérer l'image mentale de [ce que sont] les principes des étants, leur hiérarchie, l'Intellect agent et le régime de premier rang et [l'image mentale] de comment ils sont, au moyen de choses qui en seront l'imitation, sachant que leur réalité idéale et leur essence sont unes et immuables. Quant aux choses au moyen desquelles on les imite, elles sont multiples et variables, les unes, plus proches de l'objet imité, les autres, plus éloignées, comme c'est le cas des choses sensibles à la vue. En effet, l'apparence de l'homme reflétée dans l'eau est plus proche de l'homme, pour ce qui est du degré de réalité, que l'apparence de la statue de l'homme reflétée dans l'eau. C'est pourquoi il est possible d'imiter ces choses à l'intention de chaque classe d'hommes et de chaque cité au moyen de choses qui seront autres que celles qu'on emploiera pour les imiter à l'intention de telle autre classe d'hommes et de telle autre cité.

Voilà pourquoi il peut bien exister des nations et des cités [également] vertueuses dont la religion respective différera alors même que tous [leurs habitants] auront foi en une seule et même félicité.⁴²

Another sort has already imagined the things we have mentioned, except that they are not persuaded by what they have imagined. So, for themselves and for others, they show those things to be false by arguments. In doing so, they are not contending against the virtuous city. Rather, they are seeking

⁴⁰ Al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr. *Kitāb al-siyāsa al-madaniyya*, pp. 183–185; cf. Vallat's translation in Al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr. *Le Livre du régime politique*, pp. 183–184 and his note 579 on p. 183; cf. also Walzer's commentary in Al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr. *On the Perfect State*, p. 480.

⁴¹ The ability to detect these topics of contention testifies to one's philosophical capacity, which can be measured according to the subtleness of the topic.

⁴² Al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr. *Le Livre du régime politique*, pp. 178–179.

guidance and the truth. Whoever is like this, has his level of imagination elevated to things that the arguments he brings forth do not show to be false. If he is persuaded in thus being elevated, he is left there. But if he is not persuaded by that either, and falls upon topics he can contend against, he is elevated to another level. But if he does not chance to be persuaded by one of the levels of imagination, he is elevated to the ranking of truth and made to understand those things as they are. At that point, his opinion becomes settled...

Among them is a sort that imagines happiness and the principles [of the existents], but it is not within the power of their minds to form a concept of them at all. Or it is not within the power of their understanding to form a sufficient concept of them. So they present as false what they imagine and seize on the topics of contention in them. Whenever they are elevated to a level of imagination that is closer to the truth, they present it as false. It is not possible for them to be elevated to the level of truth, because it is not in the power of their minds to understand it.⁴³

This raises the problem of the “noble lie”, discussed in the *Republic* 382a4–d3, 389b and 414b–415d, and typically understood as “a means for smoothing over dangerous truths that the populace may not be prepared to accept”.⁴⁴ Al-Fārābī briefly refers to this problem in the *Kitāb al-alfāz al-musta‘mala fī al-mantiq*.⁴⁵ Later Ibn Bājja in the *Tadbīr al-mutawaḥḥid* §86 will argue that the “lie (read: inadequacy. – J. E.) of the symbols” (*kidhb al-alghāz*) is an inevitable precondition for the achievement of happiness for the non-philosophers.⁴⁶

⁴³ Alfarabi, Abū Naṣr. *The Political Writings*. Vol. 2. Political Regime and Summary of Plato’s *Laws*. Ithaca, NY, and London: Cornell University Press, 2015, pp. 91–92.

⁴⁴ Moore, Kenneth R. *Platonic Myths and Straussian Lies: The Logic of Persuasion*. *Polis*, 2009, 26/1, p. 90.

⁴⁵ Al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr. *Kitāb al-alfāz al-musta‘mala fī al-mantiq*. Maḥdī, Muḥsin (ed.). 2nd ed., Beirut: Dār Al-Mashriq, 1968, p. 92, ll. 3–6.

⁴⁶ Ibn Bāǧǧa. *La conduite de l’isolé*. p. 140 (meanwhile, he disapproves of the ‘lie of the discourse’ (*kidhb al-baḥṭh*), i.e. a deceitful (sophistic) manner of discussion, which pursues some selfish purpose – see Genequand’s remarks *ibid.*, 42 and 287). Ibn Rushd in his *Commentary on Plato’s Republic* I, XII (Averroes. *Commentary on Plato’s Republic*. Rosenthal, Erwin I. J. (ed., transl.), pp. 5–6; cf. *ibid.* *Averroes On Plato’s Republic*. Lerner, Ralph (transl.). Ithaca, NY, and London: Cornell University Press, 1974, p. 24) endorses Ibn Bājja’s opinion.

As it is well known, Leo Strauss was deeply interested in the problem of noble lie. Remarkably, in a letter to Alexandre Kojève, Strauss states that ‘the astrolatry (i.e., the metaphysical statements about the gods, the soul and the afterlife. – J. E.) of the *Timaeus*, *Laws* X and *Epinomis* is either purely ironical, or forged (by the Eudoxian Speusippus), or...preached to the people for the reasons of state’ (Strauss, Leo. *On Tyranny*, Chicago: Chicago UP, 2000, p. 289; quoted from Moore. “Platonic Myths,” p. 112). In other words, he believes this part of Plato’s teaching either to be purely exoteric, or not authentic. Moore claims that Strauss viewed Plato’s metaphysics as ‘part of an exoteric programme of official deceit designed to conceal the “true teachings” that are not for the masses’. Moore, Kenneth. *Platonic Myths*, p. 113).

Conclusion

To sum up, there seems to be sufficient evidence that Al-Fārābī's political philosophy grew out of Plato's *Republic*, representing a systematic allegorical interpretation of the story of the Cave. We can agree with Philippe Vallat that Al-Fārābī's theory of imitation represents a synthesis of Plato's theory of images (as discussed, in particular, in the line analogy in the *Republic* 509e–510a3) and the theory of the classification of homonyms, developed by Aristotle's commentators.⁴⁷

As it has been rightly observed by a number of scholars (e.g. by Charles Genequand⁴⁸), instead of the really existing forms of constitution and political life, Islamic political philosophy deals predominantly with an ideal/model city and/or exemplary religion. The philosophers who described it in their works, were well aware that this perfect model would never be implemented in the societies in which they lived: the intended function of the model city was to serve as an object of reflection and a reference point for an assessment of contemporary political regimes.⁴⁹ Hence, we can claim that ancient Greek political thought exerted its influence on Arabo-Islamic political philosophers mainly through the models or paradigms it provided. The principal paradigms – those of the Cave, the Philosopher-King, the Excellent City and the achievement of happiness through divinization – were provided by Plato's *Republic*, whereas many particular aspects of their reception in the Arabo-Islamic milieu were pre-determined by the specific traits of the earlier Hellenic, Roman/Byzantine and Syriac scholastic tradition (such as placing a strong emphasis on rhetoric), through which the political teachings of Plato and Aristotle were transmitted to the Arabs.

⁴⁷ Al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr. *Le Livre du régime politique*, p. 185, n. 583.

⁴⁸ Ibn Bāḡḡa. *La conduite de l'isolé*, p. 42 of Genequand's introduction.

⁴⁹ Hence, I believe, Ibn Khaldūn's characteristic of the Excellent City envisaged by the philosophers as "a hypothesis (*farḍ*) and assumption (*taqdīr*)" (Ibn Khaldūn. *Muqaddima*. Quatremère, Étienne (ed.). 1st ed. Paris, 1858, 2nd ed. Beirut: Librairie du Liban, 1970. Vol. 2, p. 127; cf. Butterworth, Charles. Ethical and Political Philosophy. In: *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy*. Adamson, Peter; Taylor, Richard C. (eds.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 266) is not wrong, but fails to hit the main point.